

Dear Mr. Keahey:

Thank you for your presentation before the Mississippi River Commission during the public meeting held in Vicksburg, Mississippi, on March 6, 2002. In your statement you discussed the following items of concern:

a. Stated that your levee district's main emphasis is the Ouachita River as it relates to completion of the remaining levee enlargement items and requested support for funding this project. You also expressed pleasure concerning funds provided to study bank caving on the Ouachita River.

b. Expressed concern over the lack of funding for maintenance on the Ouachita-Black navigation project and pledged support to obtain the needed funding.

c. Expressed satisfaction with the progress on the Sicily Island Levee project and the current schedule for construction of the remaining items.

d. Discussed a possible solution to the environmental requirements associated with maintenance of drainage channels in your levee district.

As you mentioned, the Vicksburg District has awarded the last contract for repair or replacement of drainage structures through the Ouachita River Levees. The work to rehabilitate the remaining structure under the West Monroe floodwall has been delayed due to high water in the river but will be completed as conditions permit.

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The Corps is committed to completing the Ouachita River Levees, Louisiana, project, as funds are made available. The remaining levee work includes Items 2 and 3 in the Bastrop to Monroe reach and resurfacing of the Monroe to Sandy Bayou reach of the east bank levee. The Fiscal Year 2002 appropriations bill included \$1.5 million to continue this work. Although no funds are included in the President's budget for Fiscal Year 2003, the Corps is prepared to continue this work if additional funds are made available.

The Corps is pleased that a Congressional Add was received in Fiscal Year 2002 to prepare a report which will prioritize the most critical caving locations on the Ouachita River. This report is scheduled for completion in December 2002.

We understand the impact of no maintenance dredging to the Ouachita-Black region and appreciate your pledge to work with Congress to obtain the funding needed to continue maintenance dredging.

Construction is currently underway on Levee Items 1C and 1D of the Sicily Island Levee project. In addition, the Vicksburg District awarded the construction contract for the Billys and Falcon Bayous plugs on August 10, 2001. This is the last construction contract. Based on current construction schedules, the District should complete the Sicily Island Area project in September 2002, barring unforeseen delays.

Although the use of tree shredding equipment in channel maintenance activities is not likely to trigger the requirement for a Section 404 permit, associated activities might do so. For example, the reshaping of channel banks and bottoms, which is frequently a feature of such projects, typically involves the discharge of dredged or fill material, even if unintended. Also, if the tree shredding equipment were used in such a manner that stumps are removed or subsurface work is involved, a permit would probably be required. Further, if berm construction or land leveling were required to facilitate equipment

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operational/safety concerns, access across the channel, or to smooth irregular surface features, a permit would again be required. The Corps welcomes the opportunity to discuss your maintenance proposals further and applauds your initiative in this area.

Thank you again for your presentation. The Commission appreciates receiving your views and will be pleased to hear from you at our future public meetings.

Sincerely,

Edwin J. Arnold, Jr.
Brigadier General, U.S. Army
President, Mississippi River
Commission